

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ASUNCI 02940 01 OF 02 152002Z

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ACTION ARA-10

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R 151918Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY ASUNCION

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7872

INFO AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

AMEMBASSY LIMA

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 ASUNCION 2940

FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHLAUDEMANN FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, PINT, PA

SUBJ: TRENDS IN THE SOUTHERN CONE

REF: STATE 171456

1. IN MANY RESPECTS PARAGUAY IS OUT OF STEP WITH ITS SOUTHERN CONE NEIGHBORS, EVEN THOUGH ALL HAVE REGIMES DOMINATED BY THE MILITARY.

A. UNLIKE THE OTHERS, PARAGUAY REMAINS BACKWARD, ISOLATED AND LARGELY UNKNOWN TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD. IT IS ONE OF THE POOREST COUNTRIES IN LA WITH AN UNEDUCATED AND LARGELY INARTICULATE POPULACE.

B. UNLIKE THE OTHERS, IT HAS NO TRADITION OF DEMOCRACY. THE CHIEF OPPOSITION PARTY, THE RADICAL LIBERALS, INSTITUTED THE STATE OF SIEGE IN 1929, WHICH HAS BEEN IN EFFECT SINCE ALMOST WITHOUT INTERRUPTION, UNDER WHICH POLITICAL (AND SOMETIMES HUMAN) RIGHTS ARE FREQUENTLY DENIED TO OPPONENTS OF THE REGIME IN POWER, AND WHICH

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PAGE 02 ASUNCI 02940 01 OF 02 152002Z

HAS BEEN MAINTAINED BY SUCCESSOR DICTATORIAL

REGIMES OF WHATEVER PARTY.

C. UNLIKE MOST OF THE OTHERS, PARAGUAY'S MILITARY REGIME HAS BEEN IN POWER FOR ALMOST THREE DECADES, AND UNLIKE THE OTHERS IT GOVERNS IN COALITION WITH THE DOMINANT POLITICAL PARTY (COLORADOS), RATHER THAN TRYING TO RULE ALONE.

D. PARAGUAY SHARES WITH THE OTHER REGIMES BOTH TERRORISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEMS, BUT IN CONTRAST TO THE OTHERS, BOTH TERRORISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS ARE STILL ON A RELATIVELY MODEST SCALE.

2. THE COMMUNIST AND TERRORIST THREATS ARE DISTINCT.

A. THE PCP PER SE POSES VERY LITTLE CHALLENGE, THOUGH THE GOP TENDS TO CONFUSE THE ISSUE (AND ASCRIBE TO THE PARTY A STRENGTH IT LACKS) BY CLASSIFYING ALL ACTIVIST OPPOSITION AS "COMMUNISM". MOST PARAGUAYAN COMMUNISTS ARE EITHER SUBDUED OR ABROAD, OR BOTH. THE PARTY IS ILLEGAL, AND THE ARREST OF A HANDFUL OF KEY PARTY MEMBERS IN DECEMBER OF LAST YEAR HAS DRIVEN THE PARTY FURTHER INTO OBSCURITY.

B. THE TERRORIST THREAT IS REAL, AND COMPRISES MANY CURRENTS, INCLUDING CHIEFLY AN ACTIVIST COLORADO PARTY SPLINTER GROUP WHICH OPERATES OUT OF ARGENTINA AND HAS BEEN LINKED TO THE ERP AND VENEZUELA IN THE PAST; AND MORE RECENTLY, AN ERP-TRAINED TERRORIST ORGANIZATION WHICH WAS UNCOVERED BY PARAGUAYAN SECURITY IN APRIL. IN SCALE HOWEVER PARAGUAYAN TERRORISM IS STILL RELATIVELY UNIMPORTANT, THOUGH BELIEVED TO BE GROWING. HOW SUCCESSFUL THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT IS IN STAMPING OUT TERRORISM WOULD HAVE A DIRECT IMPACT HERE, SINCE MOST TERRORIST ACTIVITY INSIDE PARAGUAY STILL EMANATES FROM ARGENTINA.

C. IN THIS CONNECTION, ANY IDEA OF A MONOLITHIC OR CORRDNATED SOUTHERN CONE APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM OF SUBVERSION SHOULD NOT BE APPLIED TO PARAGUAY. AS FAR AS WE KNOW THERE IS MINIMAL, AND AT BEST GRUDGING, COOPERATION BETWEEN PARAGUAYAN AND ARGENTINE SECURITY FORCES. THE PARAGUAYANS BELIEVE THE ARGENTINE SECURITY APPARATUS TO BE DEEPLY INFILTRATED BY ERP AND OTHER TERRORIST GROUPS; AND ARE CONVINCED THAT

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PAGE 03 ASUNCI 02940 01 OF 02 152002Z

ANY ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT (RIGHT, CENTER OR LEFT) NATURALLY TAKES PLEASURE IN DENYING PARAGUAY GENUINE COOPERATION ON ANY MATTER OF IMPORTANCE, SECURITY, POLITICAL OR ECONOMIC. THIS MAY BE PARANOIA, BUT IT IS REAL AND EVER-PRESENT. THE GOP BELIEVES IT GETS BETTER COOPERATION FROM BRAZIL (THOUGH THIS BREAKS DOWN ON THE IMPORTANT MATTER OF SMUGGLING, INCLUDING NARCOTICS IN WHICH BRAZIL IS PROPERLY WARY OF THE GOP). TOWARDS

THE BOLIVIAN GOVERNMENT PARAGUAY FEELS ONLY HOSTILITY AND SUSPICION (PRESUMABLY FULLY RECIPROCATED). CHILE AND URUGUAY DO NOT ENTER INTO THE PICTURE, BEING NON-CONTIGUOUS.

3. WE ANTICIPATE NO SPECIAL CHANGES IN PARAGUAY'S POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PROSPECTS OVER THE REMAINDER OF THE YEAR.

4. HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEMS WILL CONTINUE, IN SPITE OF INCREASED INTERNATIONAL CRITICISM, BECAUSE OF THE PERCEIVED TERRORIST THREAT AND THE GOP'S UNCERTAINTY AS TO HOW TO HANDLE IT.

A. THE GOP IS EXTREMELY JITTERY AND THEREFORE PRONE TO REACT HARSHLY. BRUTALITY IN THE TREATMENT OF PRISONERS IS TRADITIONAL IN PARAGUAY, AND INVESTIGATORS ARE UNTRAINED AND LACK SUBTLETY. TORTURE IS TOO OFTEN A ROUTINE METHOD OF EXTRACTING INFORMATION OR CONFESSIONS. IN THE PRESENT CLIMATE OF TENSION POLICE ARE AFRAID TO RELEASE APPARENTLY INNOCENT PRISONERS FOR FEAR THEY MAY BE HELD RESPONSIBLE IF ONE SHOULD LATER TURN OUT TO HAVE BEEN GUILTY AFTER ALL. THE SECURITY APARATUS IS VERY INEFFICIENT AND SLOW TO ACT IN THE BEST OF TIMES, AND THESE ARE NOT GOOD TIMES FOR THE GOP.
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PAGE 01 ASUNCI 02940 02 OF 02 152005Z

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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 ASUNCION 2940

FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY SHLAUDEMANN FROM AMBASSADOR

B. PARAGUAY INCREASINGLY IS BEING ASSOCIATED WITH OTHERS SUCH AS CHILE, URUGUAY AND BRAZIL AS A HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATOR, AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE IS NOT A DOMINANT FACTOR IN US-PARAGUAYAN RELATIONS. EFFORTS (FROM OUTSIDE) TO TRY TO FORCE THE GOP TO CHANGE ITS WAYS HAVE NOT SUCCEEDED, AND HAVE TENDED TO HARDEN THE GOP'S ATTITUDE AND RAISE ITS SUSPICIONS AS TO THE MOTIVES OF THOSE ADVOCATING PUNITIVE ACTION. SO LONG AS THE US CAN AVOID PLACING ITSELF IN AN ADVERSARY POSITION, WE BELIEVE WE CAN CONTINUE BRINGING SOME POSITIVE INFLUENCE TO BEAR ON THE GOP, ON A DAY TO DAY BASIS. EVEN IN THE BEST OF CIRCUMSTANCES IT IS UNREALISTIC TO THINK WE OR ANY OTHER OUTSIDERS CAN CHANGE BASIC ATTITUDES HERE OVERNIGHT, HOWEVER.

5. PARAGUAY WILL REMAIN IDEOLOGICALLY SEPARATED FROM THE "DEMOCRACIES OF THE NORTH/CARIBBEAN AREA" BUT WHETHER THE IDEOLOGICAL GAP WIDENS WILL DEPEND LARGELY ON WHAT INITIATIVES THE NORTHERN LEADERS MAY TAKE -- ON SUCH ISSUES AS CUBAN REINTEGRATION
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PAGE 02 ASUNCI 02940 02 OF 02 152005Z

INTO HEMISPHERE AFFAIRS, OR CRITICISM OF THE SOUTHERN DICTATORSHIPS FOR THEIR HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS.

6. ALTHOUGH PARAGUAYAN LEADERS (MOST RECENTLY FONMIN NOGUES IN HIS MEETING WITH THE SECRETARY) OFTEN CITE FEAR OF BOLIVIAN AGGRESSIVE INTENTIONS, THE POTENTIAL FOR LOCAL CONFLICT INVOLVING PARAGUAY AND ANY OF ITS SOUTHERN CONE NEIGHBORS IS VIRTUALLY ZERO.
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